The Participation Forum
Workshop Notes*

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Participatory Evaluation

Five practitioners of participatory evaluation shared their experiences with USAID staff in the second workshop sponsored by the Agency's Participation Initiative. Randal Thompson, USAID/Bucharest, contrasted traditional and participatory evaluation; Gregg Baker, ANE/SEA, described a participatory evaluation he worked on for the Pragma Corporation; Richard Ford, Clark University, described how communities can monitor progress towards meeting development goals; Deepa Narayan, World Bank, reviewed her experience with participatory evaluation of water projects; and Joan Goodin, Management Systems International, highlighted some of the problems and issues that participatory evaluation gives rise to by recounting her experience facilitating a participatory evaluation of a conflict resolution project in El Salvador. The workshop closed with a panel discussion by USAID staff involved in re-engineering, to reflect on the role of evaluation in a re-engineered, customer-focused development agency. Diane La Voy, Senior Policy Advisor for Participatory Development, kicked off the workshop, and Anne Sweetser, AAAS Fellow, PPC, moderated. The session brought out a clear conclusion: the need to consider evaluation not as the end of a road, but as an opportunity to engage all parties—from local communities to donor agencies—in thinking honestly about how to proceed in the future.

These workshop notes cover

- ✓ *A definition of participatory evaluation*
- ✓ *Four stages of participatory evaluation*
- ✓ *Community-based monitoring techniques*
- ✓ *Distinguishing characteristics of participatory evaluation*
- ✓ *Issues that constrain the use of participatory evaluation*
- ✓ *Evaluation under re-engineering*

Workshops of the Participation Forum are occasional half- or full-day sessions focusing on discussion of participation methodologies and their applicability to USAID. Like summaries of the Participation Forum sessions, they are disseminated within USAID by E-mail and distributed to other interested parties in hard copy. The Environmental Health Project (EHP) of the Office of Health and Nutrition provides logistics support to the Participation Workshops and prepares the workshop notes. For further information, please contact Diane La Voy or Anne Sweetser by E-mail, using either the USAID directory or INTERNET [dlavoy or asweetser@usaid.gov].

A Starting Point
Diane La Voy

I propose that we take as a starting point a general definition of evaluation:

> *A systematic way to reach judgments, about the effect or significance of something, needed for making decisions.*

The interesting phrase, for our purposes today, is "needed for making decisions." We can then ask, "decisions by whom?" There are many people who make decisions, at different levels, in a development process. These range from the local "customers" and community organizations, local counterpart organizations, and grantees or contractors, to host-country governments, USAID, and other donors. A participatory evaluation recognizes the range of stakeholders and typically engages them throughout the process—from design and data gathering to disseminating results. It thereby enables different stakeholders to reach some common judgments and, thereby, to agree upon measures to improve future results.

An Overview of Participatory Evaluation
Randal Thompson

Participatory, or fourth-generation, evaluation is based on the assertion that evaluation goes beyond science—getting the facts—to include the human, political, social, cultural, and contextual elements involved in any human endeavor. It is based on the philosophical belief that reality is not a “given” to be discovered by a detached scientist; rather reality is “constructed” by actors and inquirers who are actively involved in the object of their inquiry. These actors and inquirers each have a unique perspective, and their various perspectives must be taken together in order to obtain a full and unbiased understanding of the situation at hand. Evaluation outcomes are not descriptions of “the way things are”; rather they represent meaningful constructions of actors' attempts to understand the situations in which they act. Evaluators, therefore, are not objective outsiders who set out to discover the truth about a situation, to judge its worthiness, and to recommend actions. Instead, evaluators are facilitators who assist stakeholders to construct a shared reality about the project being evaluated and to make group judgments about project accomplishments and problems. Evaluators negotiate solutions to the major project issues identified by the stakeholders themselves.

The Traditional Approach

Traditional evaluation first determines a topic to evaluate, such as how well a particular development program is performing, and then proceeds with a review of the literature on the topic. For a project evaluation, the literature review usually will include review of implementation reports, project papers, and project files. Next is development of a working hypothesis for the project, which is often based upon the output, purposes, and goal statements of the project logical framework and becomes the focus of the evaluation.

The method of inquiry for testing the hypothesis is then determined. In most USAID projects, this includes conducting interviews, site visits, document reviews, and other methods. In carrying out the work, evaluators derive findings about the hypothesis, draw conclusions, and make recommendations to project funders or implementors. Evaluators for the most part act alone in

conducting traditional evaluations and view project stakeholders as information sources rather than as coparticipants.

The Fourth-Generation Approach

A fourth-generation evaluation proceeds quite differently. It starts with an *issue*, not a topic, making the work more dynamic and implying that differences of opinion about a situation, perhaps even controversy, may exist. The issue is in fact defined by the individuals involved in a situation, such as a project, who disagree about what is happening, about whether there is success, and about what the future course should be. An important goal of this type of evaluation is to work toward resolution of the issue. This involves getting people to share their points of view about the issue and try to reach consensus on what to do about it.

The outcome of a fourth-generation evaluation is jointly planned actions that will improve the working relationships among stakeholders and consequently the project as a whole. This outcome is very different from the outcome of a traditional evaluation in which recommendations for improving the working relationships may be laid out but no attempt would be made to bring the individuals involved together to talk through the situation and reach agreement on how to improve it. In a fourth-generation evaluation action is inherent in the evaluation process. Process is a very critical component and the evaluator becomes a process facilitator, whose success is measured not by the validity of his or her judgments, but by his or her ability to enlist project stakeholders in identifying and focusing on the real issues of the situation.

(This section incorporated material from Randal Thompson, "Conducting Fourth Generation Evaluations: The Art of Construction and Negotiation," *A.I.D. Evaluation News*, 1991, No. 2, and "Strategic Evaluation: Combining Inquiry with Commitment," *A.I.D. Evaluation News*, 1993, No. 1.)

Strategic Evaluation in Pakistan

Gregg Baker

In 1989 the Pragma Corporation conducted a fourth-generation evaluation of the TIPAN project in Pakistan. TIPAN was an old-style USAID project. Assistance was provided to the North West Frontier Province Agricultural University (NWFP-AU) with the goal of merging the university and provincial extension research in order to improve both research and extension work. TIPAN hoped to change the way staff of the NWFP-AU, on and off campus, thought about their mission so that the university could become a dynamic force for improving agriculture and rural life in the province.

The project was initiated in 1985, but by 1989 when an evaluation was conducted, most of the activity was centered on the construction of new buildings. Serious questions were being raised about sustainability. USAID called for a second evaluation using a participatory approach involving a team of NWFP-AU administrators, faculty, and students. It was intended to measure progress made toward project goals and determine how best to focus project activities during the next period in order to achieve project targets and maximize sustainability.

Three evaluation specialists were recruited to facilitate the participatory process. During the first two weeks, they read documents and interviewed over 60 people to understand the issues of concern to all stakeholders. This allowed the specialists to identify appropriate individuals for the

NWFP-AU evaluation team and to develop a strategy for a workshop that would use internal evaluation as part of strategic planning, focused on sustainability.

The NWFP-AU team took a broad approach to evaluating the current state of the university in relation to the team's vision of the future of the province and the role they saw for the university in that future. They decided to develop a "sustainability" group that would facilitate development of policies and operations that maximized the AU's ability to serve the needs of the province and to be shaped by those needs. The NWFP-AU team then identified specific tasks necessary for the creation of such a body, developed a plan for carrying them out, and presented the results of their deliberations to the vice-chancellor, the deans, and USAID. Subsequently, the evaluation experts reviewed the whole process at an open faculty meeting.

Evaluation in the Context of Strategic Planning

A critical characteristic of this process is that it places evaluation squarely in the context of strategic planning that emphasizes the future vision of the university and the external environment. Equally important is the emphasis on making the evaluation truly internal and not to diverge significantly from issues considered by the NWFP-AU team and in other meetings with AU staff. In this process, evaluation is not something done to the university by outside agents primarily for the sake of measuring progress. Rather, it is something done by the university, by its own staff, primarily to serve as one input among others in a planning effort to move the university ahead.

The methodology was applied in two phases: first to develop an evaluation strategy and subsequently to structure the interaction of the evaluation specialists and the NWFP-AU team. The four stages of the methodology are given in the accompanying text box.

Four Stages of a Participatory Evaluation

- **Divergence:** an analysis leading to a rich picture of the situation. This may be accomplished with the use of the dendrogram technique (also known as mind mapping or spider-diagramming). The rules guiding this process are similar to those for brain-storming—if a participant believes something should be added, it is. There is no debate about inclusion of items, only their location on the diagram. The aim is to limit discussion of the significance of the material to a minimum and to concentrate on generating as wide a perspective and range of issues as possible.
- **Assimilation:** generating themes. By discerning patterns in the material generated in the divergence stage.
- **Convergence:** developing conceptual models of a preferred future (what needs to be done).
- **Accommodation:** debating desirable and possible action (how to do it).

The Tendency to Rush to Solutions

Using this methodology was frustrating to the NWFP-AU team. They wanted to rush from stage one—analysis of the situation—to stage four—debating possible actions—without discerning

patterns in the analysis of the situation and developing conceptual models of a preferred future. The concern was that the NWFP-AU team might become so frustrated with the apparent lack of progress in dealing with the "problems" they came with that they would withdraw, psychologically if not physically.

To be effective as a strategic planning exercise, an internal evaluation must link analyses of the past and present situations to a vision of a preferred future, develop commitment to an action plan, and gain approval of it by legitimizers. The project at NWFP-AU was evaluated for sustainability five years before its termination, sparking useful discussion and strategic planning. Sustainability issues should not be saved for the end of a project.

(This section incorporated material from "Strategic Planning for Sustainability: An Internal Evaluation of NWFP-AU/TIPAN," Pragma Corporation, Dec. 22, 1989.)

Monitoring Log Books in Madagascar and Senegal

Richard Ford

The log book approach builds on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). First introduced in Kenya in July 1988, PRA has spread rapidly to many nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. PRA describes approaches and methods such as group mapping, diagramming, and storytelling that enable local people first to share, enhance, and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, and then to plan and to act. It owes much to the traditions and methods of participatory research, applied anthropology, and field research on farming systems. Log books are being used in an environment project in Andasibe, Madagascar, to build linkages between development and conservation so that the resource users in villages adjacent to protected areas become partners in the management of both conservation and development. This new application of PRA to monitoring and evaluation is primarily a means to pass responsibility for monitoring resource use and project investment to resource users. But it is also a system to provide a minimum standard to the applications of PRA and related community-based development methodologies.

Assumptions Underlying Community Monitoring

Several assumptions underlie the monitoring project:

- Donor and international agencies are persistently in a state of financial reorganization and therefore are not reliable institutions for overseeing long-term natural resource use.
- Host-country governments lack resources and sometimes the political will to finance long-term sustainable use of natural resources.
- Resource users who derive their livelihood from the natural resource base are the primary entity with direct interest in and motivation for sustaining the resource base.

Advantages of Log Books

The log books used are presented in local languages; rely almost exclusively on visual data that can be expressed in maps, charts, graphs, and diagrams; and consist of data that community groups have identified as useful for monitoring their own progress. They do not replace national information systems, nor do they suggest that other forms of evaluation are now obsolete. Rather,

government, donor, and NGO units have often overlooked ways in which community groups can organize and maintain crucial data for monitoring and managing their own development.

A village log book has five goals. It tracks whether and how a community action plan is working; helps community residents see and act upon links between conservation and development; increases public awareness of project activity, especially in financial management; builds ownership among community groups for all aspects of project activity; and assigns responsibility for specific project activities, thereby increasing accountability.

Log books have many advantages aside from monitoring the direct and indirect impacts of project activity. They identify needed skills and capabilities and training needs; enable community groups to redesign activities based on monitored data; increase incentives for careful and thorough community assessments at all stages of the project process; and raise the probability that community-based conservation and development will continue after project funding has concluded. From the donor's point of view, log books offer a perspective on how community residents view project interventions and make it possible to collect low-cost data and perceptions about what is happening in a community and why.

Kinds of Information That Can Be Gathered

Six kinds of information may be gathered in a village log book; each has a particular use in helping a community to manage its own information and resources more effectively.

- Up-to-date information on the officers and members of key institutions in the community. This serves as a directory of the village management structure.
- Baseline information consisting at a minimum of a village base map, a village livelihood map, trend lines, and an institutional diagram. Regular updates of this information will clarify both qualitative and quantitative changes in community life. The process of updating provides a forum within the community for discussion, comment, and, as needed, actions in response to ongoing change.
- Ranking of problems and opportunities. This could help resolve conflicts within a community.
- The initial PRA exercise collects a large amount of "extra" information, some of which is not directly applicable in monitoring and evaluation: histories, transects, seasonal calendars, time lines, and daily calendars. These should be retained for future reference.
- Village and microproject indicators including both qualitative and quantitative information that will reveal whether project activity is progressing in three areas: sustainability, productivity, and equity.
- Information on individual projects for village leaders, village microproject committees, donor agencies, national associations, and government units.

(This section incorporated material from "Using Village Log Books for Monitoring and Evaluation: A Guide to Community Based Project Management" [draft], Program for International Development, Clark University, August 15, 1995.)

Participatory Evaluation of Water Projects

Deepa Narayan

Participatory evaluation is a process of collaborative problem-solving through the generation and use of knowledge. It is a process that leads to corrective action by involving all levels of users in shared decision making.

The partnership approach to problem-solving differs from the usual process of project evaluation. The users become actively involved in the development of the evaluation framework, in data collection and assessment, and in the planning of follow-up activities. As a result, corrective actions can often be taken directly and promptly, and the evaluation process itself contributes to the building of local capacity for decision making and community-centered development. Participatory evaluation is thus crucial when the overall goal of development efforts includes local capacity building.

Participatory evaluation does not preclude the involvement of external experts, or hiring people for different aspects of data collection. However, the expert plays a facilitating role in partnership with the community or program staff, rather than being the "expert supreme" who decides in isolation how the evaluation will be conducted.

Distinguishing Characteristics of Participatory Evaluation

- **Collaboration.** Collaboration improves the quality of the output and interpretation of the findings. The process of building local capacity through collaboration is more important than the methods used as the output.
- **Problem-Solving Orientation.** Participatory evaluation is oriented toward developing an understanding of a problem or situation in a way that can lead to timely action and resolution.
- **Generating Knowledge.** Participatory evaluation aims to generate knowledge among local people. When users are actively involved in data collection processes, information becomes transformed into knowledge and leads to self-sustained action.
- **Releasing Creativity.** Participatory methods are creative and fun, and learning in this environment builds self-esteem and confidence essential for initiating action. Tasks like mapping, drawing, and sorting pictures release such energy and enthusiasm that the challenge often becomes bringing the process to a close rather than struggling to keep it going.
- **Using Multiple Methods.** Validity and reliability are achieved through the use of multiple methods and by including different users and stakeholders in consensus building. Because those affected by a project are included in the decision making, with consensus governing the process, large sample surveys are unnecessary. Since community members have many demands on their time, shortcut simple methods of sampling, data collection, and analysis are preferred.
- **Involving Experts As Facilitators.** The role of the external expert, if any, is to facilitate shared decision making throughout the entire process of participatory evaluation, including identifying the purpose of the evaluation and selecting methods of data collection and analysis, field implementation, and disseminating and acting upon findings.

Guidelines for Adopting Participatory Evaluation Methods

- Keep the methods simple.
- Make a special effort to include women.
- Involve users in analyzing data.
- Don't sacrifice effectiveness for accuracy.
- Get only the information you need.

(This section incorporated material from Deepa Narayan, *Participatory Evaluation Tools for Managing Change in Water and Sanitation*, World Bank Technical Paper Number 207, 1993.)

Participatory Evaluation of a Conflict Resolution Project in El Salvador

Joan Goodin

In the wake of the peace process, USAID funded an American PVO, the Institute for Central American Studies (ICAS), to create a center in El Salvador to promote greater tolerance for divergent views. The Center for Conflict Resolution in El Salvador (Centro Demos) held courses on world affairs, international economics, and the national situation in its historical context that permitted Salvadoran leaders from various sectors to meet and discuss their ideas in a neutral context.

The ICAS and the Salvadorans decided to set up a non-profit foundation, Fundemos, to be a permanent sponsor and board of directors for the Centro Demos programs they were organizing and thus to assure the continuation of the efforts.

Two-Phase Evaluation

The consulting firm Management Systems Inc. (MSI) was hired to conduct the first participatory evaluation of the USAID-funded conflict resolution project. The evaluation involved two phases. First was design of the scope of work, in which stakeholders reviewed the efforts to date, identified key informants, and chose methods for gathering relevant information. Stakeholders agreed that the results of the evaluation would be useful only if all agreed on the purpose of the work, its scope, and its methodology. There were six interested parties: ICAS, a U.S. PVO; the Centro Demos staff; the Fundemos board; a recently formed association of graduates of the program; USAID; and MSI.

The second phase was execution of the scope of work. It started with review of the documents at Centro Demos. A Salvadoran professional was hired to design a questionnaire to be sent to all alumni. About half of the graduates were interviewed either individually or in focus groups. Thirty-five key informants from the military, civil society organizations, and the government (including the legislature), plus thirteen Centro Demos staff members, were also interviewed individually. The effects of failing to conduct any initial studies of participants' attitudes or to establish clear goals at the start of the project became clear: it was hard to measure change. The stakeholders also realized the

importance of the evolving social and political context of El Salvador: as former adversaries were communicating more openly than ever, the need for democratic leadership training was also changing.

Problems with the Draft Report

The evaluation system that USAID El Salvador uses generally calls for the draft report to be presented 10 days before the evaluation team departs from the country. But because of the participatory nature of the process, we presented the report only two days before we left. The mission was to have 10 days to get comments and suggestions back to us so that we could produce the final report.

We had a debriefing the day before we left the country. USAID staff had had a day and a half to look at the draft. We made it clear that our contract called for one set of comments and suggestions from USAID and that it was then up to the USAID people to get comments from the other interested parties. That's where things began to happen.

First of all, the facilitator was gone. The premature departure of the facilitator appears to have had a not very positive effect on the process, judging by the fact that as of today we still do not have comments. The experience of trying to get comments on the draft has made me question the need for a draft. If the parties involved, including the USAID mission, can learn what they need to know, why must there be an exhaustive written report? It is the written report that becomes the target of everyone's scrutiny, criticism, etc.

Need for an Action-Planning Workshop

By the time the draft report was submitted, I knew more about the dynamics of the organization than almost anyone else. What the stakeholders needed was a two- or three-day planning session. They felt that they had learned a lot about the Centro Demos and about one another's views. They also felt that their relations had improved significantly as a consequence of conducting the evaluation together. There were no negative comments about the process, rather they felt it had been totally participatory and totally effective.

Preparation of a succinct outline of the findings for use as the basis for a facilitated, participatory workshop aimed at reaching conclusions and formulating recommendations would have been the best way to take advantage of this openness among stakeholders. They could have built upon their understanding to create a plan for putting their shared vision into action. Unfortunately such a workshop was not included in the contract and to create it at the time would have been a major procurement issue.

This case illustrates a problem. When an evaluation is truly participatory, the process itself determines what the next step should be. But how can this be accomplished when a budget must be prepared in advance and the scope of work written out in detail? According to USAID's re-engineering directives, it's up to the stakeholders to decide whether they need a report or not. This is a big step forward. However, it may be difficult for a project manager or an office director to decide to hold a planning session rather than to require the traditional, lengthy, written report.

What is the appropriate approach here? As a contractor, we have to produce a report in a limited period of time in accord with the contract, even when a participatory process makes clear the need for a planning workshop.

We went a very, very long way in melding a common vision among three very disparate and separate entities: the center staff, the foundation board, and the graduates' association. We were just on

the verge of creating a powerful plan for the future when we had to leave. And the time that it took us to write the report could have been invested in doing that.

It is a shame that the rigid contractual structure militates against maximizing the benefits of a successful participatory evaluation process such as this. It was, and will continue to be, a wonderful learning case.

Discussion of Issues Raised by Joan Goodin

Participants in the workshop broke into six small groups to discuss one or two issues that Joan Goodin raised in discussing the El Salvador evaluation. Some of the high points of the small group discussions are given below.

Need for Reports

- Sometimes consultants feel like they need to write 40-page reports in order to show that something has happened. But it would be very useful to walk away from the assumption that the culmination of a process is a report, but not necessarily to walk away from the report. A description of a process and a one-page discussion of where the people in that process decided they needed to go next would provide more useful information about the development process than the typical 40-page report. A report may be worth doing, but maybe it should come later. It shouldn't drive the process.
- A written report helps to force closure to a process. It sets forth recommendations in a way that permits one to turn back to them. It builds or accumulates knowledge in a way that we take for granted and builds up a database that can be referred to. A written report can, but doesn't always, add to rigor. Clearly documentation of some sort is necessary, often to establish that one has used the money appropriately for the evaluation, for auditing purposes.
- Reports are useful for communication. For example, in discussing sensitive subjects, some kind of report might help in breaking down barriers of communication.

Procurement

- The whole procurement process and the way USAID officers, grantees, stakeholders, and contract officers operate is captured by the scientific model that so many of us were exposed to in graduate school. It is hard to change midway. The system still tells us that it isn't good planning if we don't plan the process through to the end. Maybe the people in USAID San Salvador saw their way through a flexible process pretty far but didn't quite see it all the way.
- As an agency, we often put unreasonable time expectations on contractors. We transfer the pressure that we're under onto contractors and expect people to put in more than 36-hour days to get something done.
- In the El Salvador case, how nice it would have been if a statement of work could have been developed, making explicit the trust that in fact had to be there for the contractor to continue. As it was, the contractor assumed the entire risk to continue even though the trust had not been set up explicitly up front. As it was, the contractor just sort of decided to go ahead. Is that right? Is that ethical? Is that the way we as an agency should set things up? Can we aspire to set forth the conditions for that kind of trust in the scope of work so that we can move from one to two without having either party assume the whole risk?
- There may be some value in having more centralized or stronger capacity to conduct evaluations. One large mission actually established an evaluation component across the board to use in all its programming. It must be recognized that the constant elaboration of little amendments and adjustments to a given procurement is tremendously expensive. That is something we want to get away from as we reform procurement.
- USAID should also be responsible for there being understanding, coordination, and open lines of communication between technical procurement and contracts people.

Evaluation Under Reengineering

- Under reengineering, evaluation should be made a continuous process rather than an intermittent one. As we see things are not working in achieving the results that we need to achieve, we will amend them, move them, change them. As part of a design, planning, monitoring, and evaluation process, we can ensure capacity building and sustainability at the local level.
- Under reengineering, strategic objective teams should be doing ongoing evaluation as part of their work, and then adjusting the work they're doing to get results.
- We're very concerned about the need to transfer the lessons or the learning of an evaluation to those who will be engaged in decision making. Often that is more than one party, and often it's parties sequenced over time. This is a complex process. Sometimes it can be dangerous to overload one evaluation with tasks. Often one evaluation needs to lead to another, to lay the groundwork for another study.

Diversity

- Since evaluations are about power, they should be inclusive in bringing all voices to the table. Many groups who ought to have a voice at the table are left out of the decision-making process. They should be brought in a representative manner. Participatory evaluation should be about empowerment through decision making, since often people who are affected by decisions don't actually get to make the decisions.
- Both in the process and the content of the evaluation, the multiple types of stakeholders must be looked at by sector, by gender, by class, by ethnicity to make sure that the differential impacts of the activity are looked at carefully.

Rigor

- Avoid naive participation. There are a lot of sins that go under the name of participation that can just lead to sloppiness. So we certainly favor hard-nosed participation.

The Participatory Planning Context

- A participatory evaluation ideally follows a participatory planning and implementation process. Now, if they haven't taken place, then the evaluation could become the first step in the process. Participatory planning is an iterative, seamless process. Participation is not limited to one stage, but takes place in the design, implementation, write-up, and follow-up. That means that a position or person must be identified to be responsible for follow up. It might be a participatory monitoring team.
- Consultation does not necessarily equal participation. Just because design and evaluation teams go out and talk to a lot of people doesn't mean that they're listening, and it doesn't necessarily mean that what they hear gets into what become the recommendations or the findings. We need lots of transparent tools that will help different groups to push their priorities.

Opportunities of Reengineering

- Because fundamental changes are being made in the design of strategic objectives and the organization of mission programs, it is a wonderful time to seize the opportunity to put participatory evaluation into the process. The process is getting formulated right now.
- The strategic objective teams evidently are going to represent a broad range of host-country nationals and institutions, a diversity of gender and class, etc. Therefore, the customers would be among those who set or determine the indicators as well as take part in the collection of information to speak to those indicators. Having this broadly based constituency setting and then eventually monitoring indicators creates a new level of ownership of development activities. Thus, evaluation is a dynamic managerial function, as opposed to a function brought in at the end.

Panel Discussion:
Evaluation and Participation in the Context of Re-engineering

Gerald Britain (PPC-Center for Development Information and Evaluation): Most of the evaluations we in USAID currently do are to inform our judgments about our programs. In the context of making decisions about our programs, we're still committed to participation as an instrumental means of making those judgments. That is going to continue to be one of the main reasons why we encourage more participation and evaluation, because it's not a matter of going out and measuring the amount of crops that grow or figuring out whether the electricity we claimed the dam was going to produce is actually being produced; it's to understand how our programs are affecting people.

Under re-engineering, the concept of evaluation has moved from the perspective of our programs for our purposes to true commitment to participation by partners in those programs. USAID is making this commitment not because we see empowering those partners as somehow making them better partners but because development is a shared responsibility, one that we can't fulfill ourselves, and therefore our partners need to be involved in our evaluation work.

Richard Byess (Bureau for Management): The reengineering office is charged with making sure that the processes that USAID invents conform with the business that we have at hand. Today's session reminded me that the fundamental truths about what we do are embodied in the way we pursue our evaluation. Somehow the processes, as embodied in the handbooks, came to drive what we did much more than consideration of the effects of what we were doing. If there is one major effect that we wish to have on the evaluation process, it's that evaluation become, much more than it has been, an integral part of our programming process, that it not be a separate step.

If anything, I would not like to see an evaluation handbook anymore. I'd like to see everything we're doing—identification of activities, strategic planning—conducted in a way in which evaluation is the primary concern: why are we doing something, whom is it affecting, and how can we change it? If we are first and foremost evaluating what it is we're doing, we can terminate activities that aren't contributing, we can redirect our activities as new perspectives come in. Reengineering should make it possible for you to alter what you're doing more quickly, and, in that way, make our foreign assistance program more effective.

This doesn't mean that evaluations are going to go away. However, we hope to have fewer evaluations driven because activities have ended, and more evaluations because we want to know what the effects of our programs are.

Elizabeth Warfield (Bureau for Asia and the Near East): I have just returned from Guatemala, a country experimental lab (CEL). We basically had to define what we were doing as the process went along because there was no guidance from Washington.

In Guatemala we were at the same stage of a lot of missions: just starting to work participation into the strategic objective/results framework. It is really important to start participation up front.

In our CEL, we had a very strong technical leader who knew how to get everyone involved. But this means good management skills on the part of the people in the mission. And so my push is to provide training to missions so that they are better able to manage a participative process. It doesn't necessarily come naturally. People need to know how to manage meetings, to facilitate communication and discussion, and to delegate to different groups that may not all be within the mission.

I see reengineering as decentralization: empowerment of the missions. Re-engineering means that activities will be more demand driven. We won't be doing evaluations for the sake of doing evaluations, but we'll do them to answer important questions.

We have to see how USAID Washington and the missions can think about their objectives more as a team. That is still a step to be addressed. USAID Washington should examine how it listens to the missions as customers.

Man from the Philippines [title]: I think in the context of reengineering, midterm evaluations are going to have more weight because evaluative information is needed on a more continuous basis so that we can constantly redesign our activities as we go along. The Philippine mission will focus on how best to obtain evaluative information on a cost-effective, timely basis, and in a way that best serves our programming interests and allows us to be accountable for things that we have daily control over, so that we can make midcourse corrections in the appropriate fashion. The process should be much more tied in with a mission management information system.

Sher Plunkett [title]: Performance monitoring plays an accountability role in many ways. Evaluation is about answering questions. People who say that the new directives won't require evaluation are wrong. In fact, we may be doing far more, but they will be smaller efforts. The information may come from the formal performance-monitoring system, which would depend on baseline and trend data, but it may also come informally from site visits or meetings with colleagues.

John Bierke (Bureau for Management): When we who were involved in reengineering went through the process to come up with the new systems, including evaluation, we were all looking for the best practices. We were looking for the things that had worked best and produced the best results over the years, and the things that everybody was comfortable with.

Over the last 20 years or so, we have codified all of the things that we have done, to the point that we quit looking at the best practices. Twenty-nine years ago, when I joined USAID, everybody was talking about participation. How do you do development except to get out there with the beneficiaries and with your partners? It's not a new concept.

And as we start to reemphasize those things that we know that have worked, we must be prepared to focus on these things that we've always known are the ingredients: the participatory process, going out and getting additional information when we're not sure about things, and going back to being a learning organization.

Conclusion

Diane La Voy

Today we have discussed two basic rationales for participation in evaluations. One of them is the rigor in getting information—listening to people, involving people so that their input allows us to answer those questions that need to be answered. The other is the concept of empowerment: enabling people who are engaged in the development process in their country to be more fully engaged and to be empowered as decision makers. USAID may not really be fully committed yet to the second rationale for participation. However, in our strategies for sustainable development, we do establish that the definition and the whole basis for sustainable development is increasing local capacity. We are

making good sense to talk about evaluation as something that, just like everything else we do, should uphold the basic objective that we're about: sustainable development.

Evaluation cannot be looked at in isolation. It is inextricably linked to planning and achieving: planning, achieving, judging, and around and around the circle. We need to think about what that implies about how we handle procurement tasks.

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